

Dr S Diravidamani

Assistant Professor Department of English,
Periyar University Arts and Science College,
Mettur, India.
mani.diravi@gmail.com

Cultural Disputes Depicted in Chetan Bhagat's 2 States

Abstract: A young brigade of writers is now carving a niche in the world of India's new-age fiction, churning out corporate novels, thrillers, chick-lits and campus novels to name a few sub-genres. Chetan Bhagat as the voice of a generation of "New India" who brought in a drastic, deliberate shift in Indian writing in English through his campus novels. People from different cultures often have such radically different worldviews that what seems like common sense to one side is anything but sensible to the other. These sensible situations and events are depicted in the novel realistically with which people can easily relate with themselves. The cultural difference in north and south India has been scribbled with great effectiveness.

Keywords: corporate novels, sensible situations, cultural.

Conflict between cultures in Chetan Bhagat's 2 States- A delight to read

Chetan Bhagat leads as India's latest youth icon and the author of four immensely popular novels Five Point Someone, One Night @ The Call Centre, The Three Mistakes of My Life and 2 States: The Story of My Marriage. He is a young man writing for the youngsters and this makes him popular with the youth of today. His writings are simple to understand and have an ideal flow to them and they always have a social message intertwined within. By this he has

touched a nerve with young Indian readers and acquired almost cult status, and this undoubtedly says a great deal about their tastes, attitudes and hopes. Bhagat might not be another Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie or Arundhati Roy, but he has authentic claims to bring one of the voices of a generation of middle-class Indian youth facing the choices and frustration that come with the prospect of growing wealth.

Chetan Bhagat has been the fore runner of a new breed of authors who don't use heavy duty English instead he just uses simple spoken English in India, Indian sentiments, passions. The chic humour that the author makes use of, instantly strikes a chord among the readers. Use of partial jargons at the appropriate positions makes them wittily amusing. Each one of his novels has dealt with a young love story, which seems very real. Be it a call centre love story or a college love tale or a student smitten with her tutor, none of these are irrelative to the present real world of the young. All his books have remained best sellers since their release and have inspired major Bollywood films. The New York called Chetan "the biggest English novelist in India's history".

Chetan Bhagat's latest novel *2 States: the Story of My Marriage* is a formula book; it works wonders with the average Indian reader. He has portrayed the typical Indian marriage scenario the grips the youngsters of the 21st century. The subtle style of Bhagat's writing will continue to win him accolades from all over. He is proving why he is the most read English novelist of India. He has sensed the nerve of the youth to the perfection. *2 States* is nostalgic as it brings back the old memories of one's own pre-wedding days. The struggle, conquest, religion - everything is perfect and apt to the groove. A galaxy that has been created out of a small issue takes you inside the Indian culture.

Much like a formula film, it's got emotions, sex, friendship, music, betrayal, exploitation, Indian families on the verge of break-up and then re-uniting, elaborate weddings,

tearful mothers, nosy relatives, spirituality, office politics, just for-laugh lines and a predictable ending.

The basic plot of the novel is presented at the cover of its paper back as

“Boy loves Girl. Girl loves Boy. They get married

In India, there are a few more steps:

Boy loves girl, Girl loves boy.

Girl’s family has to love boy. Boy’s family has to love girl.

Girl’ family has to love boy’s family. Boy’s family has to love girl’s family.

Girl and boy still love each other. They get married”.

In this book, Chetan Bhagat presents the difference of opinions and conflicts between people belonging to different states and communities. But this is presented in a way that will make the readers feel delighted. The author tries to show that even though India celebrates unity in diversity, people are quite skeptical to marry their sons and daughters to someone from a different state in their very own country.

2 states is based on the love story of a Punjabi boy and Tamil girl, who wants to get married. But they want their marriage to take place with the approval of parents of both sides; means boy’s parents must approve the girl and vice-versa besides both the parents accepting each other.

Chetan has actually tried out an entirely different layout for the book, quite different from the usual crop. So, we have book that’s written like the script for a drama or even a teleplay, for that matter. Yes, the chapters are divided into Acts I, II, III, IV and V. The language is simpler, the descriptions are more vivid and the plot is better-laid-out. Bhagat has carefully edited out the sex though! The pacing of the book is perfect- not one boring moment in the book! Once you start reading, you’d put the book down when you’re done with it.

2 States has a series of some hilarious moments and instances that bring out the idiosyncrasies and dogma practiced by the two states. Also there are instances which would draw the thoughts of the reader to the notion of being an Indian before a South Indian or a North Indian. In a world, where borders are getting dissolved slowly with technology and development, such a thought carries lot of weight. And in a country like India which has many India's in it, the magnitude of such a thought gets magnified

Through 2 States, Bhagat exposes the backward mentality of Indians, nuances of regions and religious and how intercaste marriages are still seen as a social stigma. Indian love marriages scenarios, especially when they have to be sanctioned by the couple's families present a more complex scenario than love marriages elsewhere. This novel is a humorous and witty take on inter-community love marriages in India, citing the numerous awkward situations that both the couple in love as well as their families has to pass through before their wedding can be finalized.

2 Sates, as the name suggests, it is not about two states in India- Tamilnadu and Delhi but about the diverse state of mind of people hailing from the two states also. Written with a easy to read prose style, the plot is about two individuals Ananya Swaminathan, a Tamil Brahmin from Chennai and Krish from Delhi who meet at IIM Ahmadabad.

The first phase of the book introduces the lead characters – Krish & Ananya. It begins with how they meet each other. In spite of being in one of the biggest institutions where studies are a priority, they manage to fall in love. People will love these tidbits of life. The second & third phase involves the introduction of families, their dislike of each other, their disapproval of the relationship and how Krish pataofies the Tamil Family.

Each chapter is a delight to read and the familiar settings of the places makes it all the more fun to read. The fourth section of the book has the reverse act where Ananya has to ensure that everyone in Krish's family likes her and how she manages that. The fifth section focuses

on the meeting of two families. And the last section concentrates on the end, well yes a Happy End where the boy marries the girl with the approval of both the families and then they live happily ever after.

The starting of the story is set in Ahmedabad where Krish and Ananya study in the Indian Institute of Management. When Ananya starts having some trouble with a subject at college, Krish offers to help her. They start meeting every night to study and the obvious happens: they fall in love. As the story progresses we see that the couple gets serious about each other and decide to get married. The families do not approve of the diverse traditions and think low of the future of their marital harmony. The rest is about how they try to win back the blessing of their in-laws after a series of futile attempts due to their varied culture.

The basic differences listed out by Chetan Bhagat in 2 States are their way of viewing things, eating habits, customs and traditions, likings etc.

Chetan Bhagat has written some good funny one liner about what the North Indians feel about the South Indian & what the latter feel about the former. He takes a hard dig at south Indians-in particular Tamil Brahmins, their traditions and their mentality. He brings out pretty well the contrast between South Indian vs North Indian culture and the mutual disdain these two groups have for each other.

The way Chetan portrayed the struggle to make his marriage a success never allows the reader to get his eyes off the book. The culture difference in north and south india has been scribbled with great effectiveness. The "larger than life" living style of punjabi's and the melowed down south Indian life style has been put with lot of sincerity.

For a Punjabi hating Tamilians is not old-fashioned at all. They have a notion that south Indian girls would trap the North Indian men. They also think Tamilians to be docile and scared. Tamilians wore a lot of gold whereas the Punjabis wore jewels that had precious stones and pearls hanging from them like shapeless dry fruits.

The dressing habits of Tamilians are different from that of the Punjabis. Tamil men don't believe in pants and wear lungis even in shopping districts. At home they don't wear shirts and are found in bare bodies. As for women sari is common among south Indians, but for Punjabis Lehnga is famous.

Punjabi's condemn Tamilians and call them Madarasi's and think that the heroes in Tamil films are fat, bald and have thick moustaches and the heroine next to them would be a ravishing beauty. Tamilians even regard their heroes as 'Thalaivar'. They even influence the common people and they follow the style of the heroes. The city is filled with film posters.

The eating habits of both these people vary a lot. Punjabi's have hot Paranthas for breakfast whereas Tamilians have idli with coconut chutney. The eating habits of Punjabi and Tamils are elaborate, making one think that Chetan Bhagat is definitely a glutton. Tamilians have the habit of using green banana leaves as their plates and they eat with their hands. They also use a lot of curd in their meals, and they also have a lot of coconuts. The different varieties of dishes found in South India are Kozhakattai, Masala Paniyaram, dosa, adikoozh, kandharappam, seeyam, athirasam, idiappam, sambhar, rasam, vegetables, curd, payasam etc. As for Punjabis nothing can soothe them like food. They love food.

Few things bring out the differences between Punjabis and Tamilians than buffet meals. Tamilians see it like any other meal. They will load up on white rice first, followed by daal and curds and anything that has little black dots of mustard, coconut or curry leaves.

For Punjabis, food triggers an emotional response, like say music. And the array of dishes available in a buffet is akin to the philharmonic orchestra. The idea is to load as many calories as possible onto one plate, as most party caterers charge based on the number of plates used.

Punjabis love food as well as dancing in parties and functions. A Tamilian household is usually silent, but a Punjabi household is never silent, even when people sleep at night.

Chetan makes fun of Punjabi women too. They come in two sizes- the overweight, obese elderly Punjabi women who tend to push wads of notes down their cleavage; and the young anaemic Punjabi girls who go for the size salwar kameez is funny to read.

Chetan also says that when people land at Chennai airport, they exchange smiles and proceed gently to the car part. At Delhi, there would be traffic jam of people trying to hug each other.

Tamilians have a great love for knowledge and education while Punjabis are more interested in money and wealth. Marble flooring is to a Punjabi what a foreign degree is to a Tamilian. South Indians have a love for rules, and feel safe when there are rules to adhere to. But the North Indians in General have a disdain for not only rules, but also the law and experience strange satisfaction in bending them, even breaking them. The elderly South Indians tend to speak in monosyllables while addressing the not so old and their great love for newspapers that they read from end to end, is a non-disputable fact.

Tamilians have a great love for Carnatic music. They can tell good singers from bad, like Punjabis can judge better chicken in a jiffy. They also love to keep complicated names first and then make acronyms for the same. Chennai where people tend to be conservative, love Carnatic music and go to bed early apart from having a penchant for South Indian food. Well, if this is one side to the coin, then the other side to the coin is also well showcased. And that is about the Delhi where people have an air of haughtiness and an unseen halo of wealth and ego which surfaces at every possible occasion without miss. A gaudy display is best seen at a get-together or marriage and the book vividly brings it out.

Chetan states that North Indians are fairer than the Tamilians and the Tamilians have a complex due to their complexion. He also demonstrates a fine Punjabi skill-of showing off their wealth as part of an innocent conversation.

Bhagat has done a splendid job in capturing the characteristics of a Chennai's conservatism, obsession with Carnatic music and The Hindu, Tamil Brahmin household, and how they live life by the rules. Their priorities in life: foreign degree, US-based groom, IIT-IIM if studying in India - in that order- is well portrayed. He does an equally great work in depicting the Punjabi household, their ostentatious lives, and the high-drama that rules the weddings and how much importance is given to food.

Tamilians have the habit of leaving their footwears outside their houses and they consider bringing them inside the house as unhygienic and unhealthy. But the Punjabis don't have such habits.

Drinking in parties and wedding has become a part of Punjabi culture. But the Tamil Brahmins don't consume alcohol or non-vegetarian. They also have the habit of applying a lot of oil in their hair, which Punjabis won't do.

There are graphic account of the colourful and ostentatious Punjabi weddings and the fun filled South Indian Brahmin marriages. South Indians believe in nakshatram the astrological chart. Until the nakshatram matches, the boy and girl are not allowed to talk. But the only nakshatram the Punjabi think about is the division of petrol pumps when they have to see the girl.

During the marriage ceremony South Indians have the Vrutham, the wedding initiation prayers. They also have Nischayathartham, the formal engagement ceremony where they set the auspicious time for the wedding and give gifts to close relatives. When the Vrutham takes place the couple would sit near a fire urn, which is not too different from Punjabi weddings. Priests would chant mantras. In Punjabi weddings people only came around the fire after eating their dinner and dessert. But in South Indian marriages everyone live around the fire.

During the marriage the bridegroom and the bride have to wear their traditional dresses namely- veshti and kanjeevaram sari respectively in South India. The bridegroom going for

KashiYatra is explained in a detailed way in the book, in which the bridegroom would stand up and announce that he wasn't interested in the wedding and was going to Kashi, or Varanasi, to become a Sadhu with an umbrella in his hand. The bride's father would go after him and convince him that he should marry his daughter instead.

After this ceremony they have Maalai Maatral, which involved an exchange of garlands like the Punjabi Jaimala. Then they have Oonjal where the couple would sit on a swing as their relatives would feed them small pieces of banana soaked in milk.

After this ceremony they would go back to sit around the fire where Kanyadaan-(where the couple would hold a coconut dipped in turmeric and the bride's mother would pour water over it) takes place.

During the ceremony the bride sits on her father's lap. After Kanyadaan,Mangalyadharanam takes place, during which the bridegroom would tie a gold necklace with a flat rectangular pendent around the bride's neck, called the Taali.

Saptapathi or the seven sacred steps will be performed after Mangalyadharanam in which brides sari and bridegroom Veshti would be connected in a knot and they would hold their hands. The bride would then place her husband's feet and he would then place her feet on her husband's feet and he would help her take seven steps around the fire. Then silver rings would be slipped on to the wife's toes by her husband.

Finally the couple would lay fully flat on the ground in front of every elder relative to receive the blessings and this is known as namaskaram.

The story emphasizes on the family bonding, the togetherness and yes the never ending love in the relationship. The story also dwells upon the relationship of father-son, son-mother, husband-wife, the in-laws, the typical Punjabis born and brought up in Delhi, the staunch Tamil Brahmins.

The rest of the story is all about introspection, juggling personal and professional life, stealing moments to spend time with each other, and a strategic effort in convincing parents and make the North-South connection happen.

The book is perfect opportunity of depicting the typical Indian mentality of not accepting inter-caste marriages and the tradition of still living in 'age-old orthodoxal and impractical beliefs'. The book shows how the so called "Unity in diversity" tagged nation has so much diversity when it comes to inter cultural matrimony and love.

Chetan Bhagat brings out the subtleties that exist in the lifestyle and outlook towards life of people from different states. The book seems to be a straight part 2 of 'Five Point Someone'. 'Hari' has apparently become 'Krish'. There are mentions of 'lost semesters', 'affairs with the prof's daughter', 'traveling in car with the professor', and there's even a detailed chapter regarding how the old affair didn't materialize. And to top it all, we have Krish's repeated assertions about his aspiration to be 'a full time author'. The parallels with real-life are too many.

As Indian society is not liberal for mixed marriages between different castes, religion or geographies, this book takes us through the love and opposition from parents and relatives. The narration is superb, sometime while reading you will feel like you are watching a movie, also the book is full of great humour and lastly it also gives a message to the society that love and marriage is a bonding between two souls and not about what the society perceives of it.

What with the high-brow culture of South, its love for knowledge, its hatred for showing it off, its earthy ways of eating food etc- Krish struggles to be accepted by his would be in-laws. Ditto for Ananya- her would be mother-in-law can't imagine she doesn't know how to make masala bhindi.

Two states is probably Chetan Bhagat's best write so far and the author has agreed that

a lot of what is there in the story is taken from his own personal experience. The author himself is a Punjabi Boy and his wife Anusha is a Tamilian thus the book in some ways is inspired from real life.

People from different cultures often have such radically different worldviews that what seems like common sense to one side is anything but sensible to the other. Different cultures and worldviews can lead to completely different understandings or frames of a conflict, making resolution a challenge.

The book is very humorous and takes digs at both the Punjabi and the Tamil community. Most of the book is very realistic; a lot of people can probably connect to the Indian sentiments that are portrayed in the novel. The book tries not to be preachy and manages to maintain the humor quite consistently, thus making it a good light read.

Bibliography

Bhagat, Chetan. *2 States: The Story of My Marriage: A Novel*. New Delhi: Rupa and Co., 2010. X, 269.

Singh, Jai Arjun. "The End of Pretension." *Biblio: a review of books* 14.3 and 4 (Mar-Apr 2009): 27-28.

<http://www.bindass.com/post/chetan-bhagat-2-states-the-story-of-my-marriage-book-review/>

http://www.mouthshut.com/review/2_States_The_Story_of_My_Marriage_-_Chetan_Bhagat-194081-1.html